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Conference on Soviet Bloc Tries to Unwrap the Riddle From the Enigma

By GEORGE STEIN, *Times Staff Writer*

WASHINGTON—To those who focus only on summits and arms talks, the Soviet Bloc may sometimes get to be just so many missiles, armies and spies, all targeted menacingly at the United States.

However, to academic specialists—not to mention legions of others with more exotic interests and axes to grind—the Soviet Union and its satellites are something far more complex than the silhouette cast by the geopolitical competition with the United States. They represent a cultural and historical ant hill of endless complexity and fascination.

And so it is that every five years, the expert and the merely curious come together from all parts of the West to share insights, information and gossip at the largest scholarly conference outside Moscow devoted to Eastern Europe. This year's assemblage, which ended in Washington earlier this week, attracted 2,500 people from 42 countries. Seemingly every topic in Slavic studies, no matter how obscure or remote, underwent examination during the five-day World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies.

Take the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885: One panel spent half a day on that.

For those who wondered what it was like to spend the Stone Age in the Balkans, three scholars were ready to tell.

Several panels dealt with life down on the farm. One subject: "Is there still an Eastern European peasantry?"

And for the literary inclined, there was a session on "Neglected Russian Prose of the 19th Century."

Then there was Peter Koltypin, the stocky commander of the Order of the Russian Imperial Union, who is engaged in the quixotic task of reversing the outcome of the Russian Revolution. Koltypin, though conceding that this may take some time, reported that the Grand Duke Wladimir, who lives in France, is ready to assume his rightful throne.

"We are fighting to restore the monarchy," Koltypin said.

Even this smorgasbord was not enough for one academic in a meeting on modern Czech history.

"It struck me from listening to the papers," he complained, "that we did not have anything on the Slovakians." His grandfather, he explained, was Slovakian.

The forthcoming summit between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail S. Gorbachev, though the subject of intensive press coverage, was little more than an annoying distraction for many of the scholars at the conference.

Jonathan Sanders, assistant director of Columbia University's W. Averell Harriman Institute and a frequent television commentator, complained that he had to defer work on his specialty, the Russian Revolution, because of the fuss over the summit.

"Someone has to inform the American public," he said with an air of resignation.

And when Secretary of State George P. Shultz sent regrets that he could not deliver his scheduled keynote speech, everyone knew why.

"We do recognize of course that Secretary Shultz has some other business to attend to these days," Stanford Prof. Alexander Dallin, president-elect of the International Committee for Soviet and East European Studies, explained to knowing smiles.

It was not as if the conference was closed to the hot topics of the day. Hundreds attended the panel, "The Soviet Military Build-up: Scope, Sustainability and Purpose." At another well-attended panel, a scholar examined similarities in the way the two superpowers view each other. At a third, a CIA analyst went through Moscow's recently published draft Party Program, which is expected to serve as the basic ideological blueprint for the Soviet Communist Party through 2000.

On the jobs bulletin board was a notice from the Fourth Psychological Operations Group at Ft. Bragg, N.C., which needs an intelligence research specialist.

"Must be able to secure a SECRET clearance," the notice advised.

Soviet authorities forbade their scholars from attending. Dallin said the official explanation was that certain topics and certain participants were not acceptable. Unofficially, a senior Soviet official gave a different explanation to Dmitri Simes of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"Look," Simes quoted the Soviet official as telling him, "we are on the eve of the summit and we do not want a bunch of irresponsible academics pontificating and being quoted in the New York Times and the Washington Post as authoritative sources on Soviet foreign policy."

The exhibit hall provided ample proof of Dallin's opening characterization that "the field of East European and Soviet studies has . . . shifted from a labor of love of a few individuals to something of an international industry."

Many of the booths offered the standard weighty political, economic, historical and military analyses of the Soviet Union, its East European satellites and its relations with the rest of the world. However, salesmen and hucksters, who earlier would have passed up this sort of conference as a bad bet, showed up as well.

For $6, you could buy a six-foot poster of Lenin. "Saves painting your bathroom door," declared book dealer Leroy Wolins.

"Available now . . . confidential U.S. State Department central files:

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The Soviet Union," one sign advertised. The files, recently declassified, covered the years from 1945 to 1954.

Free test copies were distributed of an English-language edition of Pravda that will hit the streets soon, produced by Associated Publishers of St. Paul, Minn.

Two computer firms, XenoTechnix Inc. and Dragonfly, sold devices that would enable a personal computer to print the Cyrillic characters of the Russian alphabet.

And Koltypin was not the only dreamer seeking to waken long-sleeping passions. Croatian Books of Cleveland brought dozens of books about that Alpine part of northwestern Yugoslavia, which last enjoyed an independent existence in 1918.

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